AETV-BG- CG   6 June 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division and Task Force Danger

SUBJECT: Commanding General's Message, 6 June 2004 Combat Patch Ceremony

Today the 1st Infantry Division and Task Force Danger soldiers pause to consider the enormity of Operation Iraqi Freedom. We pause to reflect upon our accomplishments and sacrifices. We honor our 40 comrades who have given their full measure, all with us in spirit today. We have accomplished so much with simultaneous combat and stability operations in our mission to set the conditions for freedom and democracy in Iraq. Indeed, today we join the thousands of Big Red One veterans who proudly wear the combat patch, the shoulder sleeve insignia of former wartime service.

It is appropriate that we conduct this ceremony on the 60th anniversary of D-Day. It is a great day to reflect on the sacrifices of so many and connect the past with the present. Consider the valor of Staff Sergeant Walt Ehlers of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry on 9 and 10 June 1944 near Goville, France. SSG Ehlers was leading his squad as the spearhead of the attack, repeatedly leading his men against heavily defended enemy strong points and exposing himself to deadly hostile fire. On his own initiative, he led his squad against an enemy position, personally killing four in an enemy patrol. He then crawled forward under heavy machine gun fire and put the gun crew out of action. His then turned his attention on two mortars protected by the crossfire of two machine guns. Through a hail of bullets, he destroyed the mortar section and personally killed three more of the enemy. He then single handedly destroyed a machine gun position. The next day, deep in enemy territory, his squad covered the withdraw of his platoon, and he later single handedly engaged the enemy to ensure the safe withdrawal of his squad. Though wounded, he carried his wounded automatic rifleman to safety and then returned to retrieve the automatic rifle. After his wounds were treated, he refused to be evacuated and returned to lead his squad. SSG Ehlers' uncommon valor was remarkable and inspires us all.

Consider the valor of Staff Sergeant Raymond Bittinger of the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry assigned to Task Force 1-6 on 9 April 2004 near Baqubah, Iraq. SSG Bittinger's Bradley section was ordered to conduct an armed reconnaissance to confirm or deny enemy in the small town of Behriz. When crossing a bridge into the town, SSG Bittinger's Bradley, C38, was ambushed with two volley fired rocket propelled grenades (RPG). The crew of C38 engaged and killed at least two enemy soldiers before being engaged again by more RPGs and small arms. C38 engaged and killed three more enemy. Yet another enemy aimed an RPG at less than 50 meters range and SSG Bittinger directed his gunner to immediately engage. At this point, SSG Bittinger correctly assessed that the enemy was attempting to flank his platoon's position. On his own initiative, he protected the flank and forced the enemy into a piecemeal attack. Despite heavy

enemy fire, he then placed C38 between a friendly dismount squad and the enemy, saving his comrades and covering their movement. SSG Bittinger was then ordered to displace C38 south and came into contact with another RPG ambush, again killing the enemy. His platoon was then ordered to break contact. SSG Bittinger volunteered to remain in place and protect the platoon's movement. SSG Bittinger's Bradley engaged and killed five more enemy on rooftops. At this point, SSG Bittinger's Bradley was hit by three RPGs. His gunner was mortally wounded. Despite his own wounds, SSG Bittinger continued to suppress the enemy, then returned to Forward Operating Base Warhorse to attend to his gunner. While at Warhorse, the enemy engaged the government building in the center of Baqubah. SSG Bittinger asked for volunteers to rebuild his crew and joined the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop to continue the attack. With a new gunner, SSG Bittinger continued the attack back into Baqubah. His Bradley continued to engage an additional five enemy soldiers. He was later ordered to secure a bridge and remained at his post until the crew of C38 was relieved at 0530 the next morning. SSG Bittinger's uncommon valor was remarkable and inspires us all.

We are the legacy of the past. The ties that bind June 1944 to today are fundamental to who we are and what we represent. We are American soldiers. Just as those brave soldiers 60 years ago at Normandy sacrificed to free the people of Europe, you are now sacrificing to give the people of Iraq the opportunity to be free. There is no doubt in my mind that every soldier in the 1st Infantry Division and Task Force Danger has earned the right to wear the combat patch. The heroics of SSG Ehlers and SSG Bittinger are the stuff that every one of you is made of. I know that every soldier in the division combat team is fully committed to Operation Iraqi Freedom. You all contribute to the mission in a major way. We are an incredible team made up of the 1st Infantry Division; the 30th Enhanced Separate Brigade; the 2nd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division; the 264th Engineer Group; the 167th Corps Support Group; and nine separate battalions. Every one of you has my profound respect, admiration, and appreciation for a job well done. Continue the mission to your very high standard. Proudly wear the combat patch from this day forward. You all are veterans, tested under fire.

Duty First!

JOHN R. S. BATISTE
MG, USA
Commanding